

INCARCERATION: A TOOL FOR RACIAL SEGREGATION AND LABOR EXPLOITATION

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ABSTRACT

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FULL TEXT

Headnote

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Keywords: incarceration; racial segregation; exploitation; capitalism

Incarceration has become a complex system deeply embedded in the post-industrial economy of the US that, on any given day, confines more than 2 million US citizens. We are, in fact, a nation addicted to incarceration. But why? This paper utilizes the concept of the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) (Schlosser, 1998; Davis, 1998) in order to examine the complex configuration of the labor market, multi-national corporations, incarceration policies, and the inmate population that comprises the US prison system of the 21st century United States. We expand on the work of Wacquant (2001), Parenti (1999), and others by incorporating the neo-Marxist theoretical framework provided by Erik O. Wright (1997) in order to focus specifically on the way in which the PIC is deeply embedded in and instrumental to the system of capitalism. We examine the ways in which inmates, primarily African American men, provide a pool of highly exploitable labor available for extraction by all types of industries from agriculture to multi-national corporations like Microsoft. Conversely, we explicate the role that incarceration plays in removing potential laborers, who are raced, classed and gendered—primarily young African American men—from the pool competing for increasingly scarce de-skilled jobs that now characterize the post-industrial, service economy of the US. Finally, our analysis illuminates the way in which the prison industrial complex (PIC) benefits from the mutually reinforcing systems of capitalism and racial domination in a manner similar to the slave plantation economy of the

rural US south (Oshinsky, 1997).

THE CONTEXT: THE GROWTH OF PRISONS: INSTITUTIONS AND POPULATION

The number of prisons has grown, as has the number of Americans incarcerated. In 2007 more than 2.3 million Americans (or .7% of the US population) were incarcerated, in nearly 1700 state, federal, and private prisons, and more than 5 million additional Americans are under other forms of custodial supervision including probation and parole, for a total of 7.2 million Americans-3.2% of the adult US population or 1 in every 31 adults-under some form of custodial or supervisory control of the criminal justice system (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007). As noted in Figure 1, beginning around 1980 the growth in the inmate population has been steep.

Furthermore, despite the fact that we think of certain other countries as being dominated by incarceration, in relative terms, compared to other countries, the United States incarcerates a higher proportion of its population than all other developed countries and most in the developing world (Mauer, 2003).

Why do we incarcerate so many of our citizens? There are many answers to this question, and we will be exploring a variety of reasons-both overt and covert throughout this paper. Yet, the most overt answer, we believe, lies in the changes in drug laws (King, 2006; Western, 2006).

THE ROLE OF DRUG LAWS IN THE GROWTH OF PRISONS

The contemporary "War on Drugs" officially began in 1971 ' with a formal announcement by President Richard Nixon and intensified under the administration of President Ronald Reagan who added the position of "Drug Czar" to the President's Executive Office. The "War on Drugs" did not so much criminalize substances as that process had been underway for most of the 20th Century. What it did do was put into place rigid sentencing guidelines that required (1) longer sentences; (2) mandatory minimums; (3) reclassifying some drug offenses from misdemeanors to felonies; and (4) the passage of the "Three Strikes You're Out" laws (Mauer, 2003; Roberts, 2004). These changes directly resulted in the rapid increase in the number of inmates incarcerated (as shown in Figure 1). More than half of all incarcerated men and women were convicted of a drug offense, and they are disproportionately likely to be African American (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007; Roberts 2004). Furthermore, of all race and gender groups, African American women are the most likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses (23%) and White men the least likely (15%). In some states, an even graver picture is portrayed. For example, in New York state, Black and Latina women comprise 91 % of the women sentenced to prison for drug possession or sales even though they are only 32% of the state population (Mauer et al., 1999). Along with the increase in the number of inmates has been the rise in the number of prisons built to house them.

RACE AND INCARCERATION

African American men are disproportionately likely to be incarcerated. Of the 2.3 million Americans who are incarcerated, 43% (or more than one million) are African American men. In fact, more than forty percent of all American prisoners, men and women, are African American men. Controlling for gender, African Americans comprise nearly two-thirds (62%) of the male prison population, yet they make up just 13% of the US male population (Roberts, 2004).

In terms of probability, 90 out of every 1000 men will be incarcerated in their lifetimes. When we break the data down by race only 44 out of every 1000 White men (4%) will be incarcerated but 285 out of every 1000 African American men (28.5%) will be incarcerated in their lifetimes (Harrison & Beck, 2005). Put another way, nearly 1 in 3

African American men will be incarcerated during their lifetimes (see King & Mauer, 2006; Kling, 2006; and Kling, Anderson, & Stith, 1999 for a summary of racial disparities in sentencing).

GENDER

Women, and African American women in particular (along with increasing numbers of Latinas), are the fastest growing of all inmate populations. Furthermore, patterns of race, ethnicity, and incarceration hold for women such that African American women are disproportionately more likely to be incarcerated than their White counterparts—nearly 50% of incarcerated women are African American. Although only 6% to 7% of the entire prison population is female, women make up over 20% (more than 1 million women) of the population under criminal justice supervision—prison, jail, probation, parole (Sokoloff, 2005). Thus, incarceration is a deeply raced and gendered phenomenon: in New York state in 1995, for example, 82% of Latina women were sentenced for drugs, 65% of Black women, and a much lower-but still substantial 40% of white women—were sentenced for drugs (Mauer et al., 1999). From a theoretical standpoint, an analysis of incarceration as a gendered phenomenon need not necessarily focus on gender differences or the experiences of women and men, but rather on the ways in which the institution itself is gendered and genders the convict experience. For example, though women hold the vast majority of data entry jobs in the US economy, much data entry that is contracted out for prison labor is, not surprisingly, conducted by men (Costanza-Chock, 2003). This is a clear example of the way in which the institution of prison genders labor; reconstituting pink-collar jobs as appropriate for men, because men comprise the bulk of the inmate population. Wacquant (2001:2) argues similarly:

It is anchored... by a system of gendered institutions that monitor, train, and neutralize populations recalcitrant or superfluous to the new economic and racial regime: men are handled by its penal wing while (their) women and children are managed by a revamped welfare-workfare system designed to buttress casual employment.

We agree. Thus, we believe it is appropriate to limit our discussion here to the ways in which men's labor is exploited by an institution and a system that are both gendered and raced. Finally, we note that the system of incarceration is also significantly shaped by social class. Most inmates were unemployed immediately prior to their incarceration and among those who were employed, they were earning wages that put them among the poor and working class (Chang & Thompson, 2002). Though we do not intend to dismiss the role that an individual's social class plays in their likelihood of being incarcerated, our focus on social class (and race and gender) in this paper is at the institutional rather than individual level. Here we concern ourselves with the way in which one class of people controls the labor market and the production of goods by removing another class of people who are deemed unexploitable from the "free world" and relocating them to an institutional setting—prison—where they are then reconstituted as "exploitable" and their labor can be extracted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE PURPOSE OF PRISON: REHABILITATION OR A TOOL OF CAPITALISM?

Our argument is framed primarily by the race, class and gender paradigm which was largely developed by African American and multiracial feminists (Anderson, 2001; Davis, 1983; Hill-Collins, 1994, 2004; King, 1988; Zinn, 2005). This theoretical paradigm rests on the assumption that systems of oppression and domination (i.e. patriarchy, capitalism, and racial superiority) exist independently and are woven together in what Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (2005) refer to as a matrix of domination. Furthermore, the race, class, and gender paradigm requires that the data be analyzed not only with attention to individual social locations but more importantly with attention to the inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) that are based in the systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and racial domination.

As powerful an analytical tool as this framework is, one of the shortcomings of the use of the race, class and

gender paradigm by other scholars is the tendency to focus on the individual level rather than the structural level. In other words, often the analysis focuses on the race, class, and gender of individual actors and how these status locations shape experiences. We focus our analysis on the structural level and the ways in which different systems of domination are mutually reinforcing: patriarchy is woven with racism (or race supremacy) both of which are woven with capitalism. For example, we are not focused on the social class or race of individual inmates, but instead examine the ways in which capitalism and the system of racial domination collude to exploit the labor of male and female inmates thus increasing profits for shareholders while simultaneously reducing competition for scarce jobs in an increasingly tenuous domestic labor market.

Of particular importance to the argument here is a focused examination on capitalism as a core organizing structure of the raced and gendered PIC. Wright's work on exploitation (1997), though not developed with the express purpose of explicating the processes in prisons offers an important framework for understanding the role of capitalism in the PIC. Pointing out, as others do, that prisons are nothing more than catchments for the undesirables in our society (Chang &Thompkins, 2002; Chasin, 2004:234-239), Wright (1997:153).extends the argument and links it directly to the "needs" of capitalist economic system:

In the case of labor power, a person can cease to have economic value in capitalism if it cannot be deployed productively. This is the essential condition of people in the 'underclass'...above all [they lack] the necessary means to acquire the skills needed to make their labor power saleable. As a result they are not consistently exploited...the underclass consists of human beings who are largely expendable from the point of view of the logic of capitalism. Like Native Americans who became a landless underclass in the nineteenth century, repression rather than incorporation is the central mode of social control directed toward them. Capitalism does not need the labor power of unemployed inner city youth. The material interests of the wealthy and privileged segments of American society would be better served if these people simply disappeared. However, unlike in the nineteenth century, the moral and political forces are such that direct genocide is no longer a viable strategy. The alternative, then, is to build prisons and cordon off the zones of cities in which the underclass lives.

According to Wright, prisons can be seen as a modern day substitution for genocide, a strategy for removing unwanted, unnecessary, un-useful members of a capitalist society. Incarceration provides a mechanism whereby the privileged can segregate or cordon-off these unwanted members of society, thus increasing the efficiency of the capitalist economy and its insatiable desire for expansion, without the moral burden of genocide. It is easy to see how prisons accomplish this goal: they remove individuals from society and they permanently (in many states) disenfranchise them from the political realm (Uggen &Manza, 2002). Prisoners and ex-convicts become virtual non-citizens, unable to challenge the economic, social or political power structures. And, the very fact of cordoning off some individuals means that the goods and riches of society are accessible only to those citizens who are not cordoned-off. As Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill (2005) note, every system of oppression has as its reflection a system of privilege. That which cordons some off, cordons others in. Put another way, along with any accumulation of disadvantage comes an accumulated advantage for someone else (Zinn &Dill, 2005). For example, Whites, especially White men, implicitly or explicitly, benefit from the sending of hundreds of thousands of African American men to prisons; specifically, high levels of incarceration effectively remove African American men from the competitive labor force and upon release they are disenfranchised in the political system (Uggen &Manza, 2002) and permanently unemployable (Pager, 2003).

THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG RACE, THE ECONOMY, AND INCARCERATION

Many scholars exploring the question of the purpose of the criminal justice system have underscored the role that the economy plays in incarceration (Chang &Thompkins, 2002; Parenti, 1999; Western, 2006). For a variety of

reasons-including the history of chattel slavery and intensive agriculture-this relationship is particularly profound in the southern region of the US (Sellin cited in Hartnett n.d.).

Prison labor became a more significant part of modern capitalism during Reconstruction because the Civil War... left the U.S. economically devastated, and deprived capitalism of its lucrative slave labor. One of the responses to these crises was to build more prisons and then to lease the labor of prisoners, many of whom were ex-slaves, to labor-hungry capitalists.

An examination of the economy of the Mississippi Delta region, where one of the largest and quintessential examples of penal agriculture-The Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, or simply "Parchman"-explicates this relationship. Oshinsky (1997) argues convincingly that Parchman was established to ease the transition for Mississippi Whites between the end of slavery and the development of sharecropping. In this setting Parchman served two main functions: social control and forced labor. Whites who feared the demise of their social order were pacified by the role that Parchman could play as a mechanism of social control over "Negroes" who might otherwise run about uncontrolled and destroy not only property but also the southern way of life.

Wright's argument underscores the point; just as Whites in the post-bellum South were worried about "Negroes" running amok, Wright carefully articulates the role that prisons and urban ghettos play in modern day America by housing unwanted, unruly, violent, drug users and thus removing them from nearby White, middle class neighborhoods and from public life.

Second, planters had serious labor concerns in an economy dominated by labor dense crops such as cotton and rice. Very shortly after Parchman was established-and it is important to note that it was developed out of a plantation-the convict leasing system was implemented. This system allowed Parchman to lease out the labor of convicts to local planters. Oshinsky (1997) provides clear evidence for this relationship between incarceration and exploitable labor by noting that the inmate population fluctuated along with the labor needs of local planters; the police would conduct "sweeps" and make arrests-specifically targeting African American men-just prior to planting, cutting, and harvest, thus creating the labor pool necessary for the convict lease system and the continuation of the plantation economy (Browne, n.d.).

In 1865, the 13th Amendment officially abolished slavery for all people except those convicted of a crime and opened the door for mass criminalization. Prisons were built in the South as part of the backlash to Black Reconstruction and as a mechanism to re-enslave Black workers. In the late 19th-century South, an extensive prison system was developed in the interest of maintaining the racial and economic relationship of slavery. When slavery was legally abolished, a new set of laws called the Black Codes emerged to criminalize legal activity for African Americans. Through the enforcement of these laws, acts such as standing in one area of town or walking at night, for example, became the criminal acts of "loitering" or "breaking curfew," for which African Americans were imprisoned. As a result of Black Codes, the percentage of African Americans in prison grew exponentially, surpassing whites for the first time.

The relationship among race, the economy, and incarceration is complex and deeply rooted in the peculiarities of US history: namely the wedding of slavery, the plantation economy, and capitalism. For 250 years the system of chattel slavery provided the most exploitable form of labor (Williams, 1944; Wright, 1997). Regardless of individuals' moral perspectives on slavery, it was an incredibly efficient tool of capitalism that had it disappeared completely would have devastated the social-political economy of the entire southern region of the US. And, though northerners don't like to believe this, would have had a negative impact on the regional and national economy as well. Thus, this morally repugnant system was quickly replaced by the system of Jim Crow

segregation which, according to Wacquant (2001:98), was important in sustaining two key aspects of the plantation slave economy: labor extraction and social segregation. Though the Jim Crow system of segregation endured chinks for many, many years, it's symbolic, if not real, demise occurs in a series of legislative and judicial decisions beginning with *Brown v. Board* (1954) and perhaps ending with the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

Curiously, though perhaps not serendipitously, another set of legislative and judicial decisions, beginning in the administration of Richard Nixon and continuing until today, result in the racial transformation of prisons (Wacquant, 2001:96).

Since 1989 and for the first time in national history, African Americans make up a majority of those entering prison each year. Indeed, in four short decades, the ethnic composition of the U.S. inmate population has reversed, turning over from 70 percent white at mid-century to nearly 70 percent black and Latino today, although ethnic patterns of criminal activity have not fundamentally changed during that period.

Wacquant argues that the current system of incarceration has developed to sustain the goals of slavery and Jim Crow segregation: labor extraction and social segregation (Wacquant, 2001:99).

By employing Wright's theory of cordoning off we extend not only Wacquant's argument but also Chang and Thompkins'. As Wright notes, we can't enslave people anymore or commit genocide, so the system of ghettos and incarceration provide the mechanism for eliminating the unexploitable who are, by definition, threats to capitalism. This cordoning off serves as both a removal from social life, as noted by Wacquant, and ultimately, through reconceptualizing inmates as "exploitable" creates a pool of extractable labor.

Aside from the severe impact of social segregation, which has been a central element of the US since its inception and continues today (see Massey & Denton, 1993), this cordoning-off creates two distinct advantages for capitalists: the removal of competition from the labor pool and the creation of a highly exploitable labor pool. We will discuss each separately.

Removal of competition

As Chang & Thompkins (2002:47) and many other scholars note, rates of incarceration vary in accordance with levels of unemployment.

When unemployment is low, the state relaxes imprisonment to allow sufficient labor to compete for wages in the free market; when unemployment is high, the state imprisons greater numbers to absorb surplus labor and suppress social unrest associated with economic deprivation... when the economy stagnates, Congress passes more federal laws that add additional activities as criminal offenses, mandates more severe penalties, and demands more strict law enforcement.

Because the incarcerated are not counted against the unemployment rate, economists and others argue that incarceration can therefore be seen as a tool for artificially controlling the unemployment rate. We argue that the role of incarceration is much more than simply a tool for controlling the unemployment rate. Working off of the assertions and assumptions of both Wacquant (2001) and Wright (1997) we argue that incarceration is a tool for removing unwanted competition from the labor market.

Certainly we understand, and the data confirm, that the majority of people in prison were not employed regularly during the months prior to their incarceration (Chang & Thompkins, 2002), and even more so, the vast majority-with

the exception of white collar criminals such as Jeffrey Stalling and Bernard Ebbers-of inmates would not be competing for white collar, pink collar, or professional jobs. Yet, we also know that the tightest competition-as measured by the highest rates of unemployment-in the current economy (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005) is precisely where those who are most likely to be incarcerated would be able to compete-in construction, the unskilled and low-skilled trades and manufacturing-where jobs are increasingly scarce as a result of the overall decline in manufacturing in the US economy coupled with increases in both outsourcing and off-shoring (Friedman, 2006).

In our research with ex-felons involved in a re-entry program, they all confirmed what Pager (2003) and others have documented, that the biggest challenge to re-entry is getting a job. And though these men all identified the increased use of undocumented immigrant labor, "Mexicans," in construction jobs as the reason they could not find work, in fact, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006), it is White men who are the most likely to hold construction jobs and work in the trades. Thus, though "Don Juan," one of the ex-offenders we interviewed, blames "Mexicans," his removal from the labor market-temporarily while he was incarcerated and permanently now that he has a felony record-reduces competition for working class jobs that are dominated by White men. Extending Wright's (1997) argument, we contend that incarceration is a tool not just for controlling the overall unemployment rate-as Chang & Thompkins (2002) demonstrate-but is in fact a tool for controlling and manipulating the competition for jobs, especially in a tight labor market. And, the racialization of the inmate population coupled with the racial segregation of occupations such as construction and manufacturing suggest that this benefit accrues primarily to working class, White men.

Highly exploitable labor pool

While Wright was astute in his observations that prisons provided a mechanism for removing the "unexploitable" labor from society, we argue that this formerly "unexploitable" class of Americans has now been redefined as highly exploitable by national and multinational corporations. Taking the lead from practices such as the convict lease system that have been around for a century or more, dozens of Fortune 500 companies-including McDonald's, Microsoft, Dell, and Victoria's secret-have moved at least part of their operations into prisons. This transition to prison labor allows corporations to significantly cut their labor costs and thus presumably increase their profits, much like plantations, ship builders, and other industries did during the 200-plus years of slavery in the United States. The PIC has, in effect, transformed unexploitable labor into highly exploitable labor (Enil and Levy no date).

Prison benefits accrue to White communities-or at least not to Black and other communities of color

In addition to the advantages that accrue to individuals, primarily White men who benefit from less competition in a tight labor pool and the White men who own and invest in the multinational corporations that exploit prison labor, advantage can also accrue to communities. For example, the prison boom coupled with the practice of locating prisons in deindustrialized and rural communities is an economic advantage that accrues to Whites and predominately White communities in the form of jobs-as prison staff-and in terms of building contracts and other services that are necessary when a town builds a prison. Though we acknowledge Gilmore's argument (2007) that rural prisons do not provide jobs for local residents but instead rely on workers who are from outside the area, we still contend that any benefits that do accrue do not accrue in African American communities.

Building prisons in rural, depressed communities has become of tool of the PIC much as building B52 bombers-for example-is a tool of the MIC (military industrial complex). One of the key political strategies that keeps politicians, regardless of party affiliation, supportive of a strong and expansive military is the fact that the majority of

congressional districts contribute to and benefit from the military build-up that has come to characterize the MIC. Specifically the Pentagon and military contractors disperse the manufacturing of most implements of war- including the B52 bomber-to nearly every congressional district. Thus, congress people are "forced" to vote for increasing military expenditures lest their district lose jobs, something most of their constituents cannot afford. Similarly, many congress people will vote for measures that lead to growth in the prison population because with this growth comes the need to build more prisons, and these prisons provide much needed employment in rural, depressed areas such as northern California (Parenti, 1999) and upstate New York (Chang &Thompkins, 2002).

...prisons provide badly needed construction and prison guard jobs in areas suffering from the flight of manufacturing and industry overseas.. .as a potential 'prize' for which poor towns compete, prison contracts are undoubtedly also used by policymakers to secure votes (Costanza-Chock, 2003 :F 13)

This provides some evidence for our assertion that incarceration is a tool of capitalism. In this case, growth in the inmate population can provide direct and specific relief to low-income individuals and communities that choose to build a prison-or two-to house this ever expanding population. And, of course, once the prisons are constructed, politicians and citizens in the community have a vested interested in keeping the beds occupied.

Incarceration also depletes political capital, both of the individual and of the community from which the individual comes. This depletion of political capital is critical both symbolically and practically. The disenfranchisement of felons has symbolic power because it takes away a right, the right to vote, that is the quintessential symbol of being an American citizen (Kerber, 1997). second, because of the high rates of incarceration of African Americans, disenfranchisement also takes away the power of African American communities to choose their political representation at the local, state, and national level. In fact the outcome of the 2000 Presidential election was shaped in part by felony disenfranchisement (Uggen &Manza, 2002). Huling (2002:212) put it thus:

So, while they can't vote, Florida's 82,000 prison inmates may figure heavily in the state's redrawing of political boundaries.. .Because prisoners in 48 states are disenfranchised, if prisoners are allowed to be counted in the region of their imprisonment for the purposes of political representation, then their votes are effectively given to those who happen to live near a prison, thus diluting the voting power of the predominately black, Hispanic, and urban prison population and giving it to mostly white, rural regions.

In addition to votes, the relocation of inmates from their home communities to prisons in other counties changes the way that resources are allocated by the state and federal government. Much like re-districting, census counts are also used in the allocation of variety of government "dollars" including social welfare and infrastructure funds and thus counties with prisons receive greater funds while those from which the incarcerated originate lose funds (Hattery &Smith, 2007).

Thus, incarceration, as it occurs in the 21st century US provides a "class" advantage for Whites at both the individual and structural level. At the individual level the growth of the PIC creates job and it eliminates competition from the labor market, especially the low-skilled labor market. At the structural level it creates a form of economic development for primarily White, rural communities. Furthermore, the prison boom has been coupled with an unprecedented collaboration with the capitalist economy in the United States such that in 2007 dozens of national and multinational corporations, as well as small townships and even colleges and universities, do business in or with prison industries. And, by and large, the individuals working to create the products are African American men-though women's labor is also exploited at prisons such as the Pocatello Women's Correctional Center in Pocatello, Idaho- who have been dislodged from their own communities and the profits generated by paying these men below market wages accrue to Whites-those who run, own, or are shareholders in the companies

doing business with prisons.

Finally, we argue that the rehabilitative goals of prisons have all but disappeared and have been almost entirely supplanted by the goals articulated by Wacquant (2001) and Wright (1997): social segregation and labor extraction.

The PIC and the Exploitation of African American Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class

At the core, the PIC is built solidly upon the economic institution of white patriarchal capitalism. Though prisons serve several functions, including providing punishment and housing those who are adjudicated as requiring separation from the larger social world, we argue here that a key purpose of the PIC is not the rehabilitation of inmates but the removal of unexploitable labor from the "free labor" market and the transformation of that labor so that it can be extracted. The extraction of surplus value of inmate labor allows prisons to reduce their operating costs and allows private prison companies to make huge profits-Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) the largest private, for-profit prison company recorded profits of more than \$2 billion in 2005 (Corrections Corporation of America, 2005)-and many multi-national corporations to record profits that surpass any that would be imaginable if they were restricted to the noninstitutionalized civilian labor force. Prison labor may well be the new "outsourcing."

In fact, the conditions for the overwhelmingly Black and Latino men and women inside the United States prison system are so similar to that of workers in the maquiladoras and sweatshops of the global South that in 1995, Oregon politicians were even courting Nike to move their production from Indonesia into Oregon prisons. "We propose that (Nike) take a look at their transportation costs and their labor costs," Oregon State Representative Kevin Mannix explained in an interview with researcher Reese Erlich, "We could offer [competitive] prison inmate labor" in Oregon. (Hamett, n.d.)

As noted, there is plenty of evidence to support the notion that prisons provide a palatable-at least more so than the forced removal and genocide practices of the 17th and 18th century US-mechanism for removing unexploitable labor (Wright, 1997) and African American men in particular (Wacquant, 2001; Browne, 2007.; Harnett, n.d.; Sheldon, n.d.). Yet, the costs of incarcerating more than two million Americans are astronomical, roughly \$23,184 per inmate per year or more than \$46.3 billion annually. To put this in perspective, in most states it costs more to house a prisoner per year than to educate a citizen in a public college for that same year.

Hence, state and federal prisons have looked for ways to keep their costs down or in the case of private prisons, to make a profit off of warehousing inmates (Haney & Zimbaro, 1998). Private prisons, like colleges or hotels that charge an occupancy fee, make money by charging local, state, and federal jurisdictions for housing inmates. The "income" that is generated by charging a fee for incarceration not only pays for the costs of incarceration but generates the huge profits that corporations like CCA report. When there is money to be made by exploiting the warehousing of people this creates a need to keep the cells full thus fueling-even if only indirectly-a feedback loop that has produced a steep rise in the rate of incarceration over the last 20 years.

Because state and federal prisons do not make money for simply warehousing people-in fact they incur significant costs as noted above-many state prison systems address the economic dilemma of paying for incarceration by requiring that inmates work. This is true for both men's and women's prisons. Many states have prison farms that run as micro-subsistence economies in which inmates produce all-or most-of the food that they eat and they conduct the majority of the maintenance for the prison, for example, lawn mowing, weeding, repair to buildings and so forth. Many state prisons also engage in manufacturing and factory work. At Parchman, for example, many

inmates work in a factory producing all of the uniforms-for both inmates and staff- for the entire Mississippi Department of Corrections. This type of "in house" factory work is common and occurs in both men's and women's prisons..

A more recent practice involves contracting the work of inmates to do manufacturing, factory work, data entry and even telemarketing for for-profit businesses ranging from Microsoft to Honda to Victoria's secret. The inmates are paid a minimal wage-almost always less than minimum wage-and are then required to pay a sizeable portion of their paychecks back to the prison, effectively paying for their own incarceration and other debts they owe the state, including child support. Corporations benefit from this form of contract labor because by paying wages that are well below market value, in many cases less than \$1 per hour, and having no responsibility to pay any benefits, they are able to pocket profits made by saving on labor costs. Additionally they are relieved of all of the supervision and conflict management associated with large labor forces as all of these duties are "outsourced" to the prison staff

Though most Americans believe that the new drug laws are designed to protect public safety by removing drug users from the population and locking them up for decades, some researchers, such as Haney and Zimbardo disagree, as do we. We argue that the drug laws that require the long-term incarceration of non-violent, mostly African American men, are in place at least in part to ensure a pool of labor that can be "cordoned off and then exploited: their surplus value extracted by multinational corporations and private prison companies. This is especially apparent when we recall the fact that 40-50% of inmates are serving long sentences, sometimes life sentences, for what Haney and Zimbardo note is often little more than untreated addiction (Haney & Zimbardo, 1998:718).

The exploitation of labor by the economic institution of capitalism is not sufficient, however, in explaining another aspect of the rise in incarceration since the mid 1970s. The growth of the PIC is directly related to the mass incarceration of African American men just as it was in the post-bellum south (Myers & Massey, 1991).² "The convict lease system was not merely a replacement for slavery, but an extension of it, albeit in a new form and serving new interests" (Shelden, n.d.) and we argue that mass incarceration and the exploitation of inmate labor represents modern day permutations of the convict leasing system that dominated the plantation economy of the post-bellum Mississippi Delta region, and other areas of the south. Furthermore, every version of this practice-from catfish farming by inmates at Parchman to inmates in Twin Rivers Correctional Facility in Monroe, Washington assembling game cubes for Nintendo-illustrate the ways in which inmate labor is exploitative; because each depends on the principle of the extraction of surplus value. State prison systems save money by exploiting the labor of the inmates they house or by leasing out their labor to local, national, and multinational corporations.

In other words, the PIC can best be understood by explicating the interlocking nature of two dual systems of oppression: capitalism and racial domination. In short, capitalism provides the tools for exploitation and the system of racial domination (along with gender domination especially as it is certain groups of men-the elite white men who dominate all other groups of men as well as most women) provides the vulnerable population. Our argument reinforces that made by Chang and Thompkins (2002:47):

...to preserve their advantage in the class, racial, and social hierarchies, the dominant classes use imprisonment as a means of political, economic, and social control over the "dangerous classes": the unemployed, the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, the political dissidents, and the racial, ethnic, and social "others."

Or as Sokoloff (2005:127) notes, the prison industrial complex can only be understood by explicating the links among the structured conditions of class, race, and gender in the context of globalization and unemployment.

Specifically, we have argued that the Prison Industrial Complex mimics the historical slave plantation mode of production. That in the end, wealthy Whites (primarily men) are profiting by not paying a living wage to African American inmates (also primarily men). Thus corporations are engaging in an exploitive labor practice, termed by Marx (Lynch, 2004) as the extraction of surplus value. By not paying what the labor is worth when inmates are working on farms, building furniture, assembling products for giant multi-national corporations like Microsoft and McDonalds, corporations can enhance their profits, just as the plantation owners, shipbuilders, and other capitalists who utilized slave (unpaid) labor did during 17th, 18th, 19th century America. The slaves were Black chattel. They had no rights and they were a captive labor force. All of the above is the same for today's prisoner. And, just as the plantation slave economy decimated African American families, so does the prison industrial complex (Bonhomme, Stephens & Braithwaite, 2006; Hattery & Smith, 2007).

In the end, we argue that the exploitation of African American male labor by prisons and multinational corporations that engage in prison industries did not arise out of the blue, nor is it coincidental. Rather, the capitalists of the 20th and 21st centuries have developed a legal way-articulated in the 13th amendment to the US constitution- to exploit the labor of African American men just as their forefathers did in the previous centuries.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to advance and extend the work of scholars writing about the prison industrial complex by incorporating the work of neoMarxist Erik Olin Wright into the discussion. Specifically, we synthesized the work of Wright (1997) and Wacquant (2001) in order to demonstrate that mass incarceration is in the best interest of capitalism. Specifically it removes unwanted competition from the "free labor" market and reconstitutes this unexploitable labor as exploitable in order to facilitate the extraction of surplus value of inmates by both state prisons and multi-national corporations. Furthermore, we suggest that mass incarceration is a "permanent" solution to the labor-work crunch experienced by working class White men because a felony results in both disenfranchisement (Uggen & Manza, 2002) and long-term unemployability (Pager, 2003).

Just as bondage imposed "social death" on imported African captives and their descendants, mass incarceration induces civic death for those it ensnares. (Wacquant, 2001:119)

We contend that the changes in the drug laws provide the judicial mechanism or justification for incarcerating such a significant portion of the inmate population. Yet, the changes in the drug laws mask a more insidious and complex goal: the removal of men (and to a lesser degree women) from the "free market" labor pool and the relocation of these individuals to a "captive" labor pool that is highly exploitable by capitalists.³ One clear illustration of this link arose in our examination of the membership of the board of directors of the largest private prison corporation, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). We identified at least one member of the board of directors with ties to the government-specifically serving a tenure as a staff member of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control-a committee clearly linked to the development of drug laws and policies. And, we identified several members who served as CEO of the types of manufacturing companies that frequently contract with prisons for inmate labor. These links across government, business, and the prison industry are similar to the kinds of links President Eisenhower identified when he coined the term "Military Industrial Complex."⁴ This makes it difficult to believe that prisons are designed for the pure motive of rehabilitating citizens as opposed to making profits.

Like the military industrial complex, once the relationships are established a pre-determined set of actions are set into place, all built around the need to maintain the relationships among the government, big business, and the

system of incarceration.

Indeed, much as the military-industrial complex fueled the economic juggernaut of the Reagan/Bush era's redistribution of wealth and resources, so now we are witnessing the production of a correctional-industrial complex in which society's already limited resources and funds are redistributed away from social justice-based forms of spending in favor of imprisonment...the Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that state spending on prison construction increased 612% between 1979 and 1990. California is a particularly cogent example..” Its budget for fiscal year 1996/97, for the first time ever, appropriated more money for prisons (9.9% of the budget, up from 2% in 1980) than for the University of California and California State University systems combined (9.5% of the budget, down from 12.6% in 1980). Put more simply, since 1980 California has slashed educational spending by roughly 25%, while raising prison spending by roughly 500%. (Hartnett, n.d.)

Added to this is the fact that prisons in the US are filled with African American men. Thus, to use the language of Wright (1997), the PIC can be understood as a tool whose consequences-both intended and unintended-effectively cordon-off African Americans much as they were cordoned-off during slavery and Jim Crow segregation and exploit their labor for individual and "class" gain. Effectively prisoners have been identified and reconstituted as the latest, greatest captive group whose labor can be exploited. And, while inmates may see small benefits associated with the opportunities for work, as the inmates at Twin Rivers Correctional Facility so eloquently articulate, the PIC is a complex system that is not about rehabilitating inmates but is about making money for a host of national and multinational corporations. Just as the U.S. became the richest nation on earth by its extensive 250-year reliance on exploiting slave labor, today one of the ways U.S. based corporations secure their place as the richest companies in the world is by exploiting vulnerable, mostly African American male, prison labor.

Finally, we offer a revision to Wright's perspective on the cordoning-off of the unexploitable. What is of particular interest is to note that the very same people who, according to Wright (1997), are cordoned-off into ghettos and prisons-poor African Americans-for the very reason that they are defined as unexploitable suddenly become exploitable when they are incarcerated. In other words, it is not the inherent characteristics of the person that renders him or her unexploitable-demographics, human capital-but the social institutions in which they are cordoned-off. Ghettos remain full of the unexploitable, but those very same people become exploitable when they are cordoned-off in prisons instead. This transformation of labor from unexploitable to exploitable demands further examination.

Footnote

NOTES

1 June 1971, President Nixon officially declares a "war on drugs," identifying drug abuse as "public enemy No. 1." <http://www.npr.org/template/story.php7storyId=9288397>.

2 However it is also important to remember the large numbers of both poor Black women and poor White and Latino/Latina men and women also caught in this web.

3 We do not suggest here that all of the decisions regarding incarceration are intentional nor are they entirely determined by capitalists and those with ties to the prison industry. Indeed we wonder how many of those involved could have anticipated that these changes in sentencing would result in the burgeoning of the inmate population to the point that now overcrowded prisons are looking for ways to enact "early release," often for the very people most Americans believe should remain in prison.

4 President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address to the Nation, January 17, 1961. See Kurth, J. (1999). Military-industrial complex, In J. Whiteclay Chambers II (Ed.), *The Oxford companion to American military history*, pp. 440-42. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

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